

<i>item:</i>	6
<i>report:</i>	CYP21/07

## **EARLY YEARS REVIEW**

### **By Bill Alexander**

#### **Summary**

This report updates members following the Early Years Services paper presented on 19<sup>th</sup> September. The report seeks agreement from members to consult on the future of local childcare and family resource partnerships. The report also outlines proposals for consultation with elected members at Ward and Associated School Group level on future delivery of pre school education and childcare.

#### **1. Background**

1.1 In May 1998 the Government published Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland, one of a number of measures aimed at supporting families and in particular raising children out of poverty. The Strategy recognised that good quality childcare has benefits for children by promoting their development and learning, and benefits for parents, by enabling them to work. Although there was already a diverse range of childcare provision in Scotland, action was needed to fill gaps in the formal childcare sector to enable parents to take up employment or training. The overall aim of the Childcare Strategy was therefore to make high quality, accessible and affordable childcare available in every neighbourhood.

1.2 Childcare Partnerships were set up in each local authority, bringing together all those with an interest in childcare to promote its expansion in line with parental demand.

In proposing that a Childcare Partnership be set up in each area, Ministers wanted a new approach to childcare. They believed the Childcare Strategy couldn't be achieved by central or local government alone. It needed the contribution of the private and voluntary sectors, parents, the community – indeed all those with a key interest in childcare locally.

1.3 Childcare Partnerships bring these interests together along with their knowledge, expertise, ideas and resources. They identify local need, develop plans and generate proposals for the development of services to meet this need, and mobilise commitment and resources to achieve it.

1.4 The former Scottish Executives' draft Early Years Strategy (March 2003) stated that: 'Childcare Partnerships continue to play a key role in

helping local authorities to identify unmet childcare needs locally and contribute in this way to the development of Children's Services plans. They also provide a valuable vehicle for engaging key stakeholders, including the voluntary and independent sectors and service users, in the process of planning children's services. We may need to re-examine existing planning mechanisms to ensure that the wider range of early years interests reflected in this strategy are involved fully in service planning. This might be achieved through the creation of an Early Years Planning Forum in each local authority area - which could be created through a refocusing of the remit and membership of Childcare Partnerships. Alternatively, Partnerships might continue in the current form, but operate as a sub group of any future Early Years Planning Forum.'

## **2. Current Position**

- 2.1 In Highland, we moved forward on the basis suggested in the draft Early Years Strategy in 2003. At local level, Childcare & Family Resource Partnerships largely reflect the previous administrative areas. The Highland wide body is called the Highland Family Resource Alliance, and it is made up of all those involved in supporting families, including members of local Childcare Partnerships.
- 2.2 The Local Authority is responsible for convening the Alliance and provides a strategic lead. This makes sense as the local authority has knowledge of and responsibility for the wider context of services to children and families within which Childcare Partnerships operate. The Authority is also accountable to the Scottish Government for the allocation of funding for Early Years Services.
- 2.3 However, local authorities are required to take account of the views of Childcare Partnership members and ensure that they have a formative influence on decision-making, particularly about the strategic planning of early education and childcare and the allocation of Childcare Strategy funding.
- 2.4 There are currently Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships across the eight former Highland Council administrative areas, namely Caithness, Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Skye & Lochalsh, Inverness, Lochaber, and a combined partnership in Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey. Each Partnership had close links with the Council's Children's Champions, and it is intended that this should be retained.
- 2.5 It is proposed that consultation on the future of how Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships are organised in the new Areas, now takes place, involving local elected members and key stakeholders in the Childcare and Early Education sector.

- 2.6 Local Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships could follow the Highland Councils Administrative areas, reducing the number of Partnerships by four, and there would certainly be advantages in this. Areas may though choose to retain geographically based sub groups. They may also seek to have thematic sub groups around key issues, such as workforce development, additional support needs, Gaelic-medium provision etc.
- 2.7 It is recommended that a special meeting is held of the Family Resource Alliance, to canvas views on this matter, and that written submissions are also requested.

### **3. Early Years Review**

- 3.1 Following the Joint Committee on Children and Young People's paper on Early Years Services on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2007, Childcare and Family Resource Officers have begun to scope out the process of consultation
- 3.2 Childcare and Family Resource Officers have now completed an updated analysis of current childcare and early education provision.
- 3.3 The initial analysis is presently under discussion with Area Service Managers. Following the outcome of these discussions; briefings will be arranged with local Members, prior to further local consultations.
- 3.4 Meetings with providers and parents in any communities that may be significantly affected will then be held, where options can be discussed further.
- 3.5 Updates about of the conclusions and recommendations of these meetings will provided to Members in the Wards.
- 3.6 A presentation of the conclusions and recommendations will then be made to the Joint Committee on Children and Young People.

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to support the consultation on the future organisation of Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships and to note the ongoing consultation process in the review of early years services.

**Bill Alexander**

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